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ABSTRACT

Alternate Living, Incorporated (ALI) is a nonprofit agency supporting people with developmental disabilities in Anne Arundel County, Maryland, which includes Annapolis and some of the development south of Baltimore. In 1987, in partnership with the Human Services Institute (a private training and consulting organization in Maryland) and with a 3-year grant from the state developmental disabilities council, ALI launched its "Citizenship Project." The Citizenship Project's objectives were to empower people to be participating members of the community, to change ALI's role and relationship with those who need its services, and to develop the capacity of the community to accept people with disabilities as contributing members of the community. Three major areas of change for the agency included new staff positions, changing staff roles, and changing staff attitudes. Lessons learned and challenges for the future involve personal futures planning, agency change, assisting people with life changes, work opportunities, relationships, and options for children. This paper, based on a 3-day visit to the agency in April 1990, describes the Citizenship Project and provides illustrations, through anecdotal case reports, about how people's lives have changed. (JDD)

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"WE DON'T PUT UP THE ROADBLOCKS WE USED TO.": BEGINNING AGENCY CHANGE THROUGH THE CITIZENSHIP PROJECT

Center on Human Policy

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"WE DON'T PUT UP THE ROADBLOCKS WE USED TO.": BEGINNING AGENCY CHANGE THROUGH THE CITIZENSHIP PROJECT

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INTRODUCTION

Alternative Living, Inc. (ALI) is a nonprofit agency supporting people with developmental disabilities in Anne Arundel County, Maryland, which includes the small city of Annapolis, and some of the exurban and suburban development south of Baltimore. In the mid-1980s, they provided residential support to 79 people with developmental disabilities, with 125 full-time and part-time staff, to live in small scale settings such as group homes for four or six people or supported apartments for two or three people. These settings were a significant change from the large facilities that many of the people with disabilities had lived in prior to this.

However, around this time, the director and assistant director became convinced that further change could be made by the agency, which would even more significantly affect and enhance people's lives. They recognized that even in small residential settings (for example, 3-4 people), the supports provided to people are not necessarily individualized in nature. They had heard some of the stories from other places that had already initiated change in an effort to provide more individualized supports--shifting from supporting people in agency-owned group homes and apartments, to assisting people to rent and own their own homes with whatever support necessary (Taylor, 1991; Walker & Salon, 1991).

In 1987, in partnership with the Human Services Institute (HSI), a private training and consulting organization in Maryland, and with a 3-year grant from the state developmental disabilities council, the agency launched its "Citizenship Project." This paper is based on a 3-day visit to the agency in April, 1990. It begins with a brief overview of the design of the Citizenship Project. Then, some illustrations are provided

about how people's lives have changed, and in what ways some agency staffing and administrative structures have changed. The paper concludes with a section discussing the lessons and challenges of this agency's efforts at change.

THE CITIZENSHIP PROJECT

The Citizenship Project was designed as a year-long cooperative effort of ALI and the Human Services Institute, which would begin a process of agency change, and lay the foundation for further change through development of a "Strategic Plan." The three central objectives of the Citizenship Project were (Alternative Living, Inc., 1988, p. 3):

(1) to empower people to be participating members of the community;

(2) to demonstrate the effective inversion of Alternative Living, Inc. by changing our role and relationship with those who rely on us; and

(3) to develop the capacity of the community to accept people with disabilities as contributing members of the community.

It involved three phases: Phase I--Getting to Know the People; Phase II--Strategic Planning Process; and Phase III--The Strategic Plan.

Phase I included three components: (1) Get to know 15 people with disabilities who they support differently through a creative life planning process, using "personal futures planning" (Mount & Zwernik, 1988); (2) Plan for their futures with the community along with family and friends; and (3) Redirect the agency's resources toward accomplishing those plans.

Phase II focused on gathering information and studying the implications of Phase I for programmatic and organizational change. This involved a meeting of the Leadership Team (HSI staff and the director and assistant director of ALI), and program coordinators from ALI (each of whom supervises a number of house counselors and community living assistants), to figure out what ALI needed to do in order to see that personal futures planning goals were realized and to identify themes in each of the plans.

Phase III entailed the development and adoption of a Strategic Plan to guide the organizational transformation of ALI. This Strategic Plan laid out a mission statement and a vision, or set of principles, to direct further change (see Figure 1), as well as a set of "Strategic Goals" focused on (1) individuals with disabilities; (2) internal organization issues; and (3) external community issues (see Figure 2). It was developed with input from the Leadership Team, as well as ALI program coordinators, house counselors, community living assistants, and office staff, through discussion meetings, questionnaires, and interviews.

During this year, staff from the Human Services Institute facilitated the first 15 planning processes. They also provided ongoing training and consultation to agency staff. This included training around the idea of what "community" is and strategies for involving people in community places and social networks; training for agency staff in the facilitation of "personal futures planning"; and assistance with the development of strategies for decision making and problem solving. Their role was also one of helping keep the agency "on track" during the course of change by reminding them of their vision within the context of daily, weekly, and monthly decisions.

FIGURE 1

THE STRATEGIC PLAN

Vision and Guiding Beliefs

ALI has a vision that the person with the support of family, friends and ALI is in control of his or her life, and that the center of the person's life is community. The following belief statements provide the foundation for ALI's mission and the guiding principles for its work. We believe that:

The person...

...is a citizen worthy of dignity and respect and has a valuable contribution to make to the community.
...is competent to make choices both independently and with the help of friends and family.

Relationships...

...with family can play a vital role in providing support, companionship and love, and should be actively supported and nurtured.
...with friends are formed through a mutual give and take, and give meaning to one's being in community.
...formed through a support network (which may include family, friends, neighbors, co-workers, and others) will help the person to grow and expand their participation in community life.

The home...

...is a place that reflects the person's lifestyle, personality, and choices of where and with whom to live.
...provides a sense of ownership, security and control in the person's life.
...is the person's base from which to establish a sense of belonging to neighborhood and community.

The community...

...is the place where one finds dignity and respect through citizenship.
...has the capacity to include and welcome all its members.
...is the place where individuals, groups and organizations move beyond self-interest to realize their interdependence and interconnection with one another.

ALI's Mission Statement

Based on these beliefs, ALI's mission is to:

Empower and support persons who rely on ALI to create and maintain a lifestyle of their choice. ALI works with these people to find homes, jobs, friends, and opportunities to participate in everyday community life. ALI is committed to actively build and maintain the networks that will nurture personal growth and dignity as well as sustain and enrich the person's quality of life over time.

FIGURE 2
Strategic Goals

Individual Focus:

- Continue the Personal Futures Planning Process to empower individuals to make choices in their lives.
- Insure that the individual's choices with regard to their home and lifestyle are honored.
- Direct ALI resources to respond to and honor the choices expressed by individuals.
- Those individuals who rely on ALI shall have the opportunity to share in the governance of the agency.

Internal Organization Focus:

- Revise the Individual Planning Process to be consistent with the Personal Futures Planning Process, focusing on individual choices.
- Establish a monitoring system that will insure ALI's resources and decisions will respond to individuals choices with regard to home and lifestyle.
- Actively respond to staff's concerns about agency and staff role change.
- Develop and organizational culture in which:
  1. Expectations in terms of authority and accountability are clearly defined and consistently followed.
  2. Beliefs and values are internalized and clearly reinforced at each level of the organiation.
  3. Everyday office norms, such as punctuality, follow-thorugh on commitments, as well as honest and open communication contribute to an efficient and well-functioning team.
- Establish ongoing orientation and training of staff, board members and other volunteers that reflect the new mission and belief statements.
- Review and revise:
  1. By-laws.
  2. Policies.
  3. Staff roles, including job descriptions and responsibilities, as well as performance evaluations.
- Establish a financial planning process to track and allocate available resources to accomplish the mission.

Community External Focus:

- Reconcile the differences engendered by the transition to a "new" ALI structure with Developmental Disabilities Administration and other federal, state, and local organizations (pertaining to funding, licensing, regulations, etc.).
- Advocate on each person's behalf with regard to their choices for work, volunteerism, or daytime opportunities.
  1. Advocate for their rights and interests at work or in their day program.
  2. Pursue opportunities which reflect people's choices.
- Build a partnership with community individuals and organizations to accomplish the mission of ALI, and to contribute to the quality of life of Anne Arundel County.

After the completion of the Citizenship Project, HSI phased itself out of ongoing involvement in the agency change process. Over the next year and a half, the agency continued facilitating personal futures planning, for 50 additional people (by the time of the visit, in April, 1990), and worked at implementing the plans set forth for these 65 individuals.

WHAT CHANGED FOR PEOPLE

During the personal futures planning, a number of people indicated that they wanted a change in residence. Some people moved to small settings, while others already lived with one or two people, or by themselves, but wanted a change in roommates or a change of location.

Joe and Ed

Joe and Ed both formerly lived in institutions and group homes before moving to the house they now share with two other young men who are brothers, Andy and Pete. Joe and Ed knew each other prior to living together, and at Joe's planning meeting he suggested that he would like to live with Ed. In February, 1989, they moved into a small house in a quiet, residential neighborhood. Andy, who is also a college student, is paid to be a live-in roommate and provides a wide range of types of support; his brother, Pete, lives in the house and is paid for part-time assistance to Joe and Ed.

Andy has a naturally "social" personality and has used this to help all of them in the household get to know their neighbors. He has a personal sense of ownership and investment in the house and in neighborhood relationships. For instance, when asked

about house and yard upkeep, he explained that one of the reasons he attends to this is out of a feeling of "It's my house, too." He and Pete also assist Joe and Ed to maintain other relationships, including helping Joe keep in touch with his mother through cards and phone calls, and helping Ed learn to independently phone his girlfriend. At Ed's planning meeting, one of the things he indicated was that he would like a trip to DisneyWorld, so Andy and Ed made this trip together.

Teresa

Since January, 1990, Teresa has shared an apartment with a woman named Ellen. In the 2 years prior to moving here, Teresa, who is labeled severely mentally retarded and has epilepsy, lived in a variety of other settings. These included: living in a group home for seven people with disabilities; sharing the home of a staff person and her children; and sharing an apartment with her best friend, another woman with disabilities, with staff support. Currently, she rents a two-bedroom apartment, with Ellen living there also as a roommate and support provider.

In Teresa's personal future plan, which was developed in March, 1988, her "dreams" include a desire for a "smaller living arrangement." At the time of this plan, she was living in the seven-person group home. After this planning, the agency arranged for her to move in with one of the agency staff members and her children. However, staff report that this did not work out because of the conflicting demands on the staff person's time from Teresa as well as her children. Next, the agency assisted Teresa to move in with a close friend, with staff support. The two friends, however, found that

they were not well suited for living together. Finally, in January, 1990, staff assisted Teresa to rent her own apartment, and the agency contracted with a woman, Ellen, to live there as a paid roommate.

Due both to Teresa's lack of experience of various living situations and the severity of her disability, she represents a person for whom the agency has had to make "best guesses" about potential living situations. This has clearly resulted in a lot of movement for her. In addition, though, this planning process was one of the first that they did when they were all "new at it." Staff also report that they have now "gotten to know Teresa better," which will hopefully guard against continued movement.

Other people did not want to move. Some of these people were in small group homes with groups of people they liked and did not want to move away from, or were already in apartments with roommates of their choice. In these situations, the agency did two things. First, it worked to change the role of in-home staff to that of a roommate more than a trainer or teacher. Second, it assisted people to make changes in other priority areas of their lives, such as work, relationships, and leisure/community involvement.

Shirley

For years, Shirley worked at a sheltered workshop. At a planning meeting, Shirley expressed the desire to be a veterinarian. Staff explained that, based on this, they "didn't make a commitment that being a vet would happen...We tried to find out what she likes about it." As a result, Shirley has worked in a pet store since the spring of 1989. During this time, she and the store owner have developed a relationship of

mutual support. Over time, the owner has supported and trained Shirley to perform an expanding number of tasks in the store and has attended Shirley's subsequent meetings at her request. For her part, Shirley makes a valued contribution to the store, and, as one staff member put it, "When she goes on vacation, her employer hurts."

Cindy

Cindy, who has been labeled moderately mentally retarded, is in her mid-30s and shares an apartment with a friend who has also been labeled as having a developmental disability. Both women previously lived in institutions and group homes. They have been living here for 3 years--since before the Citizenship Project began.

At Cindy's planning meeting, in May, 1988, she indicated "that being with her boyfriend is a top priority. She said she would like to marry him, and have him move in with she and her roommate. She said she wanted to take a vacation with him, which already had been planned." Following this meeting, Cindy and her boyfriend, who is also labeled mentally retarded, went on their vacation to Ocean City, accompanied by a staff member. As a next step, agency staff plan to form a "circle of support" (composed of people selected by Cindy and her boyfriend--whether staff, family, friends, or whomever) around both Cindy and her boyfriend, to assist them in working out plans for the future.

WHAT CHANGED WITHIN THE AGENCY

Beginning with implementation of the Citizenship Project, there were three major areas of change for the agency, which included: (1) new staff positions; (2) changing staff roles; and (3) changing staff attitudes. Each will be briefly discussed.

New Staff Positions

The new staff positions involved hiring two "community guides," paid for by the developmental disabilities council grant, to help facilitate community connections and relationships. In addition, other people have been hired on a contractual basis to work as community guides. These guides attend personal futures planning meetings and subsequently assist people with a wide range of things, including finding jobs, finding volunteer work, and developing and maintaining relationships. Within the context of their work, the community guides accompany people to various settings; spend time there getting to know others and assisting the person to get to know others; try to figure out what types of support the person needs and who might provide it; and then approach people, if necessary, to determine their willingness and ability to help. The community guides typically spend a few weeks in a setting with the person; after that, they check in to see how things are going and/or to assist with any problem solving.

For example, Henry, one of the community guides, assisted Phil, who is supported by ALI, to get a part-time job working in a local restaurant. His co-workers provide on-the-job training, as well as support when he needs it. For Phil, this is not only a source of work, but also social relationships, since he occasionally participates in social gatherings outside of work with his co-workers. Also, Jill connected Greg, in his 40s,

who wanted to "help children, particularly children with disabilities," with a young boy, Mike, who lives in a small group home run by ALI. Mike has severe disabilities and cannot walk, or talk, or perform other self-care activities on his own. Greg visits him at least twice a week, talking to him, holding him, and assisting him with eating. Mike seems to be content and happy when Greg comes, and Greg values his relationship with Mike perhaps more than any other relationship he currently has.

A challenge for the agency has been the high turnover rate of people in the two community guide positions. In the first 2 1/2 years of the project, there were six people in these positions. According to one staff member, this may have been due to a number of factors, including: the fact that the job could be very demanding, if not overwhelming, to some people, particularly some who came to it thinking it would be a "cushy" job; and the need to find the "right person" for the job.

Changing Staff Roles

One of the components of the Citizenship Project was the opportunity to change all staff roles, to one degree or another.

One change was having all staff, not just the community guides, take part in facilitating relationships and community connections. Some staff members have been able to adjust to this new role relatively naturally and easily. For instance, Kim is a live-in support staff member for three women with disabilities who live together in a house. During their personal futures planning meetings, all three women chose to stay in this house because they know and like each other well and like living there with Kim. Kim has assisted them to form relationships with neighbors and with people in a local

church congregation. They do this by offering hospitality--baking something for a neighbor, hosting a church bible study group in their house--and by participating in neighborhood and church events.

For some staff, particularly some of those who have worked for a long time in more traditional residential services, this change in role has been challenging and difficult. There are three primary reasons for this: some were used to caretaking, and found it hard to change their stance and style to one of supporting or assisting; some staff members were not convinced of the applicability of the personal futures planning process and its implementation, particularly with respect to someone with severe disabilities; and some staff members have been hesitant about this type of change and assisting people to become more involved in the community because of an overprotectiveness related to a "mistrust of the community."

Another change was redefining the role of in-house staff from that of trainer or teacher role to that of roommate. This does not mean that these staff are not involved in any type of teaching or training. And, it does not mean that the staff and people with disabilities ultimately have equal control or power within the setting. But, it is an attempt to make the relationship less unbalanced, giving the person with a disability increased sense of a shared home and encouraging the staff person to relate to the person with the disability more like a roommate than a trainer.

A third change, at the administrative as well as direct-care level, was, as described by the director, the attempt to "turn the power structure upside down--giving power to people with disabilities." This was envisioned, within the context of the Citizenship Project, to occur through an agency role of listening to people (within the

personal futures planning process), assisting them to make decisions about dreams and needs and desires for their future, and then assisting in helping make some of these become reality.

Since the beginning of the Citizenship Project, the agency staff have assisted people to make decisions about things they would like; and, they have also assisted people to attain some of these things. However, agency administrators recognize that the actual inversion of the power structure "has not happened very well"--and that they still retain significant power and control over people's lives, such as those relating to which of a person's decisions or desires will be responded to, in what ways, and in what time lines. Some of the constraints to the actual inversion of power include both the agency's position within a bureaucratic human service system, as well as staff members' dilemmas over safety issues versus personal choice.

Changing Staff Attitudes

This involved the attempt to collectively, as a staff, change their views of people with disabilities, as well as of the community. Participation in the personal futures planning process, and being part of some of the change process, has influenced many staff members to change their perspectives about people with disabilities and, in turn, to change the way they treat them. As one staff member put it, "We view people differently; we don't put up the roadblocks we used to." Several staff members echoed this sentiment.

Effort has also been spent, as a staff, trying to work through difficulties they have relinquishing some power and control over people with disabilities. Time is spent at staff meetings allowing them to express their feelings about this.

Finally, many staff have begun to change their attitudes about the community, coming to see it as a potentially supportive and nurturing place rather than a hostile one. This change has come as they have witnessed specific examples of support given to people in various community settings. They have let go of some of their overprotectiveness, while at the same time maintaining a concern for safety and well being of people they support.

LESSONS AND CHALLENGES FOR THE FUTURE

Throughout the course of their efforts at change, agency staff members have learned a great deal about personal and agency change from successful experiences as well as those which present a challenge to them. Several areas about which they have learned, and within which they also face challenges, are described.

Personal Futures Planning

The agency used personal futures planning with individuals as a significant component of agency change. It was an attempt to change the way they provided support and change the hierarchy of power and control--by listening to people with disabilities first, giving them power and control, and basing supports on people's requests and desires.

The initial personal futures planning processes resulted in some significant change for people whom the agency supports in terms of living arrangements, work, and in other areas of their lives (Mount, 1989). In the meantime, staff and people who the agency supports, who were not involved in these initial planning processes, noticed some positive changes and requested the same. For example, staff report that people began asking, "When's my meeting?" Based on the initial successful experiences, and the enthusiasm generated by them, the agency initiated 50 additional personal futures planning processes in the following year and a half. This resulted in a situation where they accumulated an ever increasing, and eventually somewhat overwhelming, number of personal futures plans, with a simultaneously decreasing amount of staff time, energy, and resources to commit to each. Such a situation brings with it the risks of "institutionalizing" a tool such as personal futures planning, wherein it becomes routine, and the possibility for significant change resulting from it is diminished.

In terms of the planning itself, agency staff came to realize that it was not an end result in itself, but a tool. As the director put it, "We need to keep going back to the plans and changing and revising the directions we are going with people." They also learned that there is no ideal number of people for a planning process, and that there can be advantages, depending on the person and circumstances, to having both small and large groups.

In terms of follow-up to the plan, the agency learned about the importance of including the person with a disability in this aspect as well. For instance, as one staff member put it, "At first, it was...here's what we can do for you; later, it was more like...what things can you do to contribute to working toward this?"

Also, in follow-up, the agency found that it was those people who were most vocal themselves, or who had a vocal person committed to them, who tended to have the most changes result from their personal futures planning process. This was not due to a problem inherent in personal futures planning, but rather to conducting a large number of personal futures planning processes over a short period of time with inadequate resources to respond to each. In light of this, a challenge to the agency for the future is to ensure that a small group of committed people are involved in each personal futures planning process.

Planning with people who have severe disabilities has also been a challenge to the agency. Admittedly, they have "stumbled" more in trying to figure out what types of living arrangements, roommates, jobs, and other things will be best suited to the person's likes and needs. Staff members also have concerns about life changes and safety and well being of people who have severe disabilities and may be more vulnerable. It is positive that they have such concerns. Staff already have experience assisting some people with significant impairments to live in their own homes and/or work at regular jobs. They can build on the lessons they have learned from this experience to assist others.

Related to this, a challenge to the agency is to assist all staff members to have positive experiences with personal futures planning. This can help the staff, particularly those who have worked in traditional human services with people having severe handicaps, to see how a person with severe disabilities can be assisted to make choices, live in his or her own home, work, and participate in other aspects of neighborhood and community life.

Agency Change

Whether an agency uses personal futures planning and/or other tools and means for organizational change, there are some lessons which can be from ALI's experience about agency change. One is a caution about letting the enthusiasm over initial changes lead to too much change too soon. It is important that agencies proceed slowly, taking the time to learn from these changes and experiences. The determination of how much to change, and when, is critical (Lyle & O'Brien, 1991). Second, at the same time that the agency was attempting to make significant changes, the larger system in which it is embedded remains the same. For instance, many people's "homes" are still licensed and highly regulated, and it is still difficult to assist people who receive Medicaid funding, and/or who have high levels of needs, to live in their own homes and apartments. While staff members don't put up the "roadblocks" they used to, other "roadblocks" are still in place.

The agency learned that it was important, but also difficult, to get all staff members involved in and excited about the changes. This was particularly true for some of the part-time and overnight shift staff, as well as some staff members with backgrounds in traditional human service approaches. Many strategies have been utilized to try to generate and increase enthusiasm, including sharing stories at staff meeting, sharing stories in an agency newsletter, and giving staff members the opportunty to raise and discuss concerns, problems, and strategies. These, however, have not succeeded in generating unanimous enthusiasm.

During the course of any type of agency change, new roles, demands, and pressures are placed on staff; they will need time, and positive experiences, to adjust to the changes. They may also need new and different types of support from agency administrators (Lyle & O'Brien, 1991). One factor which made the process of change difficult for some staff members at ALI was the large number of personal futures plans--resulting in some staff members feeling overwhelmed by new tasks and commitments--and the fact that they saw that some of this was not resulting in significant change for people. Based on this, a continuing challenge to the agency is to figure out how to support staff members in new and different ways, and how to involve staff members in ways that give them the opportunity to experience significant and meaningful personal change for people they support.

Assisting People with Life Changes

In the process of doing personal futures planning with people, the agency learned, first, that not everyone wanted to move. They recognized, however, that (1) this did not mean the person might not want to move someday; (2) there were other changes that could occur in the person's life that could also have a significant impact (jobs, relationships, etc.), and (3) some people might not want any changes in where they are living (or working) because they have had little experience with change and/or do not know what the possibilities are.

Thus far, ALI has assisted numerous people to make some changes in their lives, particularly in the areas of housing and jobs. A challenge to the agency is to stand with these people for the long term, recognizing that people's lives are complex and that

situations which may seem to be going well after a few months may "fall apart" within the next few months (Lyle & O'Brien, 1991). Agency staff and administrators recognize that the changes that have been made are just a beginning, and that significant challenges lie ahead in the continuing support of people. There are a few aspects of this, in particular, which will need attention. First, agency staff, particularly the community guides, have been quite successful, at least in the short term, in finding community members who are willing to support people within work places and other community settings. However, the challenge will be to see that these supports continue to be provided over the long term. Also, some people with disabilities may need ongoing support by a paid worker over a long period of time (months or even years). The agency must make sure that it has the capacity to support those with such needs, to ensure that they also get equal opportunity for community involvement and participation. Second, the agency has some very competent, capable people as live-in paid roommates. It must continually seek ways to recognize and support their work. This will help minimize staff turnover and at the same time contribute to increased stability in people's lives.

Work

Prior to the Citizenship Project, ALI, Inc. did not typically involve itself in work issues. Most people who lived in the residential settings went to sheltered workshops. However, in planning with people, the agency discovered that getting a job was a high priority for a number of people. Therefore, the agency became involved in assisting people to find work.

If, however, a paying job cannot readily be found, agency staff members try to help the person find some volunteer work or activity that is meaningful to them. Some people have clearly expressed a desire to "want to help others." For a few people, however, this has resulted in their participation (albeit as a "helper") in highly segregated settings. Such settings are not the most desirable for people who are already devalued in society. It is positive that the agency has responded to people's need to "help others" and make contributions to their communities. A challenge for the agency is to continue assisting people to find ways of doing so, but in integrated, valued settings.

Relationships

A major lesson that the agency has learned is that facilitating the development of relationships is a long-term process. This is not to say that nothing has been accomplished in the way of supporting people in relationships. First, staff have assisted people to become more well-known in local establishments or with local people, groups and organizations (restaurants, churches, among neighbors, etc.). Second, staff have given time and energy to assisting people in significant relationships with others with disabilities. This has included helping arrange a marriage, helping people maintain contact and communication, and helping people work out relationship problems. Third, staff have also tried to change and improve their relationships with the people they support, making it less a professional one and more a friendly, nurturing one. The challenge to the agency is for them to continue, over the long term, assisting people to develop friendships, especially those people who the agency finds most difficult to assist

in this area. In the absence of other significant relationships, people who they support will still rely heavily on them as a source of relationships as well as support (Lyle & O'Brien, 1991).

Support of Children

Although the agency has made efforts to make these settings more home-like, children who are served by the agency have remained in the small group homes to a greater extent than adults. This is largely due to guardianship issues, and the inability of the agency to just go out and recruit families for these children to live with. However, the issue of children in these types of settings is a challenge for the agency to face in the future. One option includes deciding not to operate group settings for children and offering to families, instead, in-home supports or assistance in finding another family for their child.

CONCLUSION

This chapter describes an agency which, before initiating a process of change, was providing supports that many people and professionals would have been very satisfied with. However, for the director and assistant director of this agency, that wasn't good enough. Although the residential settings were small, they realized that people still were not being listened to very well, did not have much choice about where and with whom they lived, and were still being "fit into" the service system. Within the context of this realization, they had the courage to change and try a new way.

This path of change has not been an easy one to take--bringing with it new difficulties and challenges for which there are no guidebooks with the directions to follow. In the process of change, they have learned a lot about the people they support and a lot about themselves The greatest lessons of their experience have to do with the complexities of people's lives and personal change and the complexities of organizations and organizational change. Overall, the experiences, lessons, and challenges of the agency in the process of change are an invaluable resources for other agencies that may be considering making changes in the way they support people and in their organizational structure.

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